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# Almost true stories

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# ALMOST TRUE STORIES

Graduate Thesis  
Master of Fine Art  
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences  
Rochester Institute of Technology

by Paul Porell

August 1996

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Date : 8-12-96

## INTRODUCTION

*I remember carrying the first two pieces for my exhibition up from the basement and putting them in the living room for my parents to see. I was expecting the usual "Uh huh, that's nice." Instead I got, "What's all this stuff about death and mental illness?" There was a look of deep concern on both of their faces. I immediately became defensive. I suppose I could have answered, "It's because you both have cancer and because everything seems so screwed up right now and because..." Instead, after a long pause, I merely replied, "I don't know."*

Did the incident described above really happen? Does it really matter? I am a photographer. I also like to tell stories.

My thesis exhibition, entitled Almost True Stories, concerned a variety of issues including, but not limited to, mental health, death, religion, family relationships and statistics. Why "Stories"? As Jenny Holzer has stated, attention spans are short.<sup>1</sup> Stories, particularly ones that are concise and easy to understand, provide an excellent vehicle for communicating ideas to an audience. Why "Almost True"? Each piece was based upon either recollection of personal experience and/or data obtained through research. How much of what we remember is really true? How reliable are statistics? In short, I did not want to vouch for the accuracy of anything that I was saying.

The exhibit contained both original and appropriated imagery and consisted of eleven two-dimensional pieces that hung on a wall, two boxes that sat on a table, one fairly simple slide installation and two videos (appendix 1). The videos presented a number of very short, personal vignettes. One group of stories was called Very Short Stories (Many Concerning Religion) and Other Information. The other was named Very Short Stories (Most Concerning Death) and Other Information (appendix 2).

Generally, I saw the work as having a two-fold purpose. First, it was a vehicle for self-exploration that allowed me to examine and explain my personal history to myself. Second, it provided an opportunity to comment, albeit indirectly, on certain cultural institutions, beliefs and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Jenny Holzer, "Jenny Holzer's Language Games," interview by Jeanne Siegel, in Art Talk: The Early 80s, ed. Jeanne Siegel, an unabridged republication of the edition published in Ann Arbor Michigan in 1988 under the title Art Words 2: Discourse on the Early 80s, (New York, Da Capo Press, Inc., 1988), 296.

## AFTER THE INTRODUCTION

For some reason I hesitate to continue. So much of the work is self-referential. Descriptions and explanations always seem inadequate. I can feel the firmly entrenched fears that inhibit both close scrutiny and frank appraisal begin to rise. Questions and self-doubt take control. Other than my wife and maybe a few friends, who is really going to care? Do I depend too much on outside validation and interpretation? Will my shallowness finally be revealed? Were the good pieces really just flukes?

*I began my thesis defense by playing a video tape of my reading an excerpt from Terry Barnett's Criticizing Photographs. In one chapter, entitled "Talking About Photographs," Mr. Barnett lists a number of suggestions to help readers become better participants in critiques. He states as follows:*

*Suggest that the photographer be silent. When conducting critiques with people who make images, I find the discussions to be most productive if the photographer whose work we are considering does not contribute to the discussion of his or her pictures. This way, the photographer is much less likely to tell nervous jokes, or irrelevant anecdotes, make defensive statements, or verbally justify his or her images. Without the responsibility to talk or defend, the photographer is better able to absorb what is being said about his or her photographs. The silence of the photographer also puts the responsibility for criticism on the viewers rather than on the photographer, and this is where it should be.<sup>2</sup>*

*I thought that it would be pretty obvious that this was intended as a joke, especially the part about the benefits of not allowing the photographer to participate in the discussion.*

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<sup>2</sup> Terry Barrett, Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images, (Mountain View, California, Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990), 144.

*Interestingly, however, a number of my fellow students approached me afterwards and asked me to repeat the author's name and the book's title.*

Perhaps all of the apprehension boils down to the fear that Roberta Smith was talking about me when she observed that memorable personal experiences do not necessarily translate into memorable art. <sup>3</sup>

## STARTING POINT

If I had to pick a starting point for Almost True Stories, it would be the "identity crisis" I experienced in 1987. Obviously, how one perceives oneself is extremely important. Self-esteem is determined, in part, by how well our perceived self compares to the ideal self. <sup>4</sup> During 1987 two events occurred which placed my comfortable sense of personal identity in jeopardy. First, I stopped working full-time as an attorney in order to explore alternative career options. Second, both of my parents were diagnosed with cancer.

With respect to the former, I continue to be amazed by how dependent I had become on the identifying label supplied by my employment. Although my first reaction to passing the Pennsylvania bar exam was to think of the Groucho Marx quote about not wanting to be a member of any club that would have him as a member, my years of practicing law provided purpose, definition and an answer to the inevitable question, "And what do you do?"

As for my parents, news of their condition prompted me to contemplate my continuing status as someone's child and the final loss of childhood that necessarily occurs when a parent dies.

Examination, interpretation and reinterpretation of lived experience is a central theme in music, literature and the visual arts. <sup>5</sup> In the months that followed, I began my own version of a "life review" in order to find it's point.

What determines who we are? Is it biology? Neurology? The environment? A combination of the above? What constitutes our

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3 Roberta Smith, "In Installation Art, a Bit of the Spoiled Brat," New York Times, 3 January 1993, sec. H, 31.

4 Robert B. Brooks, Ph D, "Self-Esteem During the School Years: Its Normal Development and Hazardous Decline," Development and Behavior: Older Children and Adolescents, 39, no. 3 (June 1992): 538.

5 Steven Rose, The Making of Memory: From Molecules to Mind, (New York, Anchor Books Doubleday, 1992), 1.

**personal** identity? Is it our intelligence and emotional makeup? What about our physical appearance? What are the effects of cultural and religious influences? What role does education and experience play? And, what about the different ways that we interpret, store and utilize past experience?

This paper does not purport to answer any of these questions. Rather, they are stated here merely because they provided some direction for both my inquiries and the artwork that was subsequently produced.

A flood of memories was the natural and ineluctable result of my prolonged examination of personal history. Most of them concerned family, which has been described as the crucible where we first come to know our-selves.<sup>6</sup> Some family related recollections were stimulated by surprising, outside sources. The impetus for Odds Are, the first piece I made for Almost True Stories, was a magazine advertisement by the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression concerning the prevalence of mental illness. The main features of the ad were a photograph of a baby and text stating, "Odds are 1 in 5 that she will grow up to be mentally ill." Upon seeing the ad, I immediately remembered that as a child I had heard or read similar information and had interpreted it to mean that 1 out of every 5 people on the planet earth were either already suffering from mental illness or would soon become mentally ill. Terrible panic ensued when I realized that there were 5 people in my family. No one seemed ill yet, so I wondered which of us it would be and how soon it would strike. Of course, I was mostly afraid that it would turn out to be me. The memory was extremely vivid. It even included a mild feeling of anxiety which I assumed represented the panic I experienced as a child.

A number of pieces were produced over the following months, all dealing with the concept that 20% of the general population, at some point in time, suffers from a treatable form of mental illness. One version involved 25 photographs, in 5 groups of 5. The groups included my family, 5 artists, 5 celebrity models, 5 serial killers and 5 members of RIT's Fine Art Photography faculty. Under each image read the caption, "Odds are that he (or she) is mentally ill." The photographs were stapled in clusters to a bulletin board that had been painted a flat gray. The final version, or rather, the version used for my exhibition, featured only my family in a large wooden "frame" that had been painted white. Instead of recent photographs, high school pictures were used for my brother, my sister and myself. My mother and father were represented by their college graduation photographs. Under each image was a name and a light bulb

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6 "Familiar Strangers," Aperture, no. 114 (Spring 1989): 16.

that flickered intermittently. Above the line of photographs read the statement, "Odds are that \_\_\_\_\_ is mentally ill." A continuous play audio tape, which could be heard through headphones hanging from the frame, described how the piece originated. This description was followed by a listing of every department in RIT's School of Photographic Arts and Sciences along with it's size, which was divided by the number 5. The tape concluded with excerpts from A Guide to Psychiatric Diagnosis and Understanding for the Helping Professions, by Martin Goldberg, M.D. (appendix 3).

The rationale for using obviously dated photographs of my family was two-fold. First, the origins of the piece seemed to dictate using images that would invoke the past. Second, I was considering appropriating pictures from my old high school yearbooks for another piece entitled Changes in Male Self-Esteem Between the Ages of 14 and 18 and concluded that repeating my high school picture might serve as one of the visual threads that would tie the work together.

Although I intended to continue with my personal "life review," working on Odds Are opened the door to three new lines of inquiry. First, I wanted to learn more about how statistical information was used to evaluate, understand and explain human behavior. The second area was mental illness and, in particular, the stigma that attaches to it. Third, I wanted to investigate the nature and operation of memory. Over time, my various lines of inquiry crossed, blurred, separated and then crossed again.

## AN ASIDE ABOUT BEGINNINGS, BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

It was a hot day. The book was dull. He was bored.<sup>7</sup>

So begins Duane Michals' Take One and See Mt. Fujiyama and so began my interest in photography. It happened during my junior year in college. A sculpture professor brought Michals' book, Take One and See Mt. Fujiyama and Other Stories, to class and passed it around for everyone to see.

Take One and See Mt. Fujiyama consists of thirteen images, many of which are combined with hand written text. It relates the following story: A man is lying on a sofa in his underwear, reading a book. An envelope is slipped under his door. Inside the envelope are some pills and a note bearing the mysterious message, "Take one and see Mt. Fujiyama."

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<sup>7</sup> Duane Michals, "Take One and See Mt. Fujiyama," Take One and See Mt. Fujiyama and Other Stories, (New York, Rochester, J+M Condon Inc. and Light Impressions, 1976), 1.



The man gulps a pill down and immediately begins to shrink. He is soon only six inches tall. A naked woman then enters the room. This excites the man. Perhaps inadvertently, perhaps not, the woman sits on the man. He is surrounded by darkness. Everything is black. Slowly, the fuzzy, snow capped peak of Mt. Fujiyama begins to appear. The man exclaims something like, "They were right! You can see Mt. Fujiyama!" Eventually, the image becomes clear and it is revealed that the man has fallen asleep and that the "snow capped peak" is merely his erected penis under his underwear.

The effect of these photographs on me was profound. I seriously doubt that I was responding to the story's suggestion that every man harbors a deep fear of being consumed by a woman.<sup>8</sup> I suspect instead that it was Michals' format and his sense of humor. In any event, it was on that afternoon in the Spring of 1976 that I decided I wanted to make photographs.

In 1976, photography critic A.D. Coleman coined the phrase "directorial mode" to describe the work of a number of photographers including Duane Michals.<sup>9</sup> While the "directorial mode" is discussed more fully below, suffice it to say for now that it involves both structuring what takes place in front of the camera and exploiting the expectations of veracity that accompany a photographic image.<sup>10</sup>

The "directorial mode," as exemplified by Michals, was adopted as my method for working. I also came to share his belief that the camera could be used as a tool for self-exploration. Michals considers himself a short story writer.<sup>11</sup> His subject: himself. The stories are not autobiographical in the typical sense, however. Dreams, fears and fantasies are used as springboards for revealing the inner self.<sup>12</sup>

A variety of visual techniques, such as the use of multiple photographic images and the incorporation of handwritten text, have come to be associated with Michals. The stationary camera, the use of models to act out personal scenarios, the reduction of complex ideas into simple storylines and intentionally ambiguous backgrounds are also hallmarks of

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8 Marco Livingston, "Certain Words Must Be Said," Duane Michals: Photographs/Sequences/Text, 1958-1984, (Oxford, Museum of Modern Art, 1984), [5].

9 A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition," Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings 1968-1978, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1979), 252.

10 Ibid., 251.

11 Duane Michals, Real Dreams, (Danbury, New Hampshire, Addison House, 1976), 2.

12 Douglas Davis, "Two Visionaries," Newsweek, 18 October 1976, 111.

Michals' work. <sup>13</sup>

Prior to my arrival in Rochester and enrollment at RIT, I attended a week long workshop with Michals in Cape May, New Jersey. During one of our private conversations, I told Michals of my great interest in using both multiple photographs and, on occasion, written text, to tell stories. I also expressed my unhappiness over the constant comparisons with his work and the resulting consignment of my images to the category of "derivative." His photographs had become, I explained, a large monkey that had taken up residence on my back. Michals replied that he did not invent sequential photography, nor was he the first photographer to add text to an image. He added that I should continue doing what I liked to do, and that perhaps one day, I would discover my own unique and personal voice. Following his advice, I continued to produce my "Duane Michals-like" sequences. Finally, during my first year at RIT, I began to shed the "Michals monkey" and hear the voice that he had been talking about. Although it was very faint, I recognized it as my own.

Other artists have impacted on my work, both past and present, to varying degrees. Many were painters. Vincent Van Gogh was probably the first of import and his influence remains evident in my drawing and painting styles.

*When I was a child, I took Saturday morning painting classes at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. My teacher, Mrs. Casey, introduced the class to the works of many famous painters, including Van Gogh. What really got me interested in his paintings, however, was seeing a movie called Night of the Generals. Released in 1967, Night of the Generals starred Peter O'Toole as a psychopathic Nazi general who was always killing prostitutes. The movie also featured Omar Sharif as some sort of special army investigator assigned to investigate the grisly murders. The story took place in Paris during the Nazi occupation. In between murders, the general would go to the Louvre and stare at one of Van Gogh's self-portraits. Each time the scene would begin with the camera jumping back and forth between O'Toole's face and the painting. O'Toole would eventually start to sweat and shake. Finally, the scene would end with the camera moving rapidly between close-ups of O'Toole's eyes and Van Gogh's eyes in the painting.*

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<sup>13</sup> Marco Livingston, "A Meeting with Duane Michals," Duane Michals: Photographs/Sequences/Text, 1958-1984, (Oxford, Museum of Modern Art, 1984), [2-7].

The paintings of George Tooker were also significant. Lincoln Kersten described Tooker as a symbolic realist who was more concerned about ideas than emotions.<sup>14</sup> His paintings of social concern were commentaries on the unequal struggle between the individual and a faceless, secular bureaucracy.<sup>15</sup> They addressed the condition of the individual in society by compounding his/her sense of anxiety, terror, or resignation and suggested that what we saw was a universal fate.<sup>16</sup>

Subway and Government Bureau are arguably Tooker's best known works. However, my personal favorite is The Waiting Room, which, according to Thomas H. Garver, depicts Tooker's version of Hell: being alone while with others.<sup>17</sup> In the painting, figures mull around without apparent reason in a room that has no readily identifiable function.

In addition to Michals, my early photographic work reflects an attempt (albeit feeble) to emulate the photographs of Ralph Eugene Meatyard, which have been described as a fascinating conjunction of the mundane and the extraordinary.<sup>18</sup> Meatyard's images combine real settings with unreal effects. The result is a charged, hybrid image that is partly truth and partly fiction.<sup>19</sup> Adult and child models, wearing cheap dime-store Halloween masks to create a sense of ritual, ambiguity and paradox, are carefully posed for symbolic effect.<sup>20</sup> Overt contradictions and blatant absurdities are employed in an attempt to prod the viewer to new understandings of identity, memory and time.<sup>21</sup> According to Keith F. Davis, the ultimate subject of these staged, surreal photographs is always the same: man's strenuous and perilous voyage towards death.<sup>22</sup>

Of the more recent additions to my list of influential artists, John Baldessari is undoubtably the most important. I did not become conversant with his work until I was already well into my thesis project. However, it immediately seemed to provide a form of validation for what I was working on. Pieces produced by Baldessari during the 1960s deftly dealt with issues of meaning, context and how information can be

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas H. Garver, George Tooker, (New York, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1987), 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>18</sup> Keith F. Davis, An American Century of Photography From Dry-Plate to Digital, (Kansas City, Missouri, Hallmark Cards, Inc., 1995), 228.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

communicated both visually and verbally. <sup>23</sup> An Artist is Not Merely the Slavish Announcer. . . . raised the Duchampian question of whether the factual presentation of something, be it object, scene or idea, is enough to transform it into art. <sup>24</sup> (Baldessari's choice of images for later pieces also raised relevant questions about whether art can serve as information and whether information can be presented as art.) Further, Baldessari's reliance upon artificial and somewhat arbitrary strategies when making important aesthetic decisions made the adoption of almost any organizational device defensible.

Of particular interest to me were the pieces he created during the 1970s which reflect his fascination with story telling as a preferred means for presenting ideas. The Pencil Story is just one example of a story that makes minor, yet interesting, observations while leaving the conclusions to the viewer.

Finally, I was also intrigued by the work Baldessari produced during the 1980s which utilized circular stickers to transform individuals into generic actors and, through the use of color, convey specific information (ie. "safe", "dangerous", etc.) to the viewer. <sup>25</sup>

A number of other artists merit mention including Ed Rusha, Bruce Charlesworth, Erika Suderburg and Christian Boltanski. Charlesworth, Boltanski and Suderburg are pertinent to this portion of the discussion while Rusha is discussed elsewhere.

Charlesworth's successful blend of self-portraiture and cinema parody has produced images that are entertaining, thought provoking and open to a variety of narrative interpretations. <sup>26</sup> (When making Daily Occurrences I clearly had both his Fear and Trouble series in mind. However, I must confess that the decision to include my dog Morgan in one of the pictures was primarily an attempt to mollify my step-daughter who was constantly criticizing me for never making Morgan famous like William Wegman's Man Ray and Fay Ray.)

Much of Boltanski's early work concentrated on the issue of identity. <sup>27</sup> Childhood serves as a "common ground" for his audience and photographs

<sup>23</sup> "Lessons on Art and Art Making," Guide to Room 1, John Baldessari Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>25</sup> "Multilevel Narratives," Guide to Room 7, John Baldessari Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ann H. Hoy, Fabrications: Stage, Altered, and Appropriated Photographs, (New York, Abbeville Press Publishers, 1987), 84.

<sup>27</sup> Roger Marcel Mayou, "Portrait of the Artist as a Work of Art: Body Art or Permanence and Continuity in the Self-Portrait," text for Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography: Photographers Reflecting Their Own Images, ed. Erika Billeter, (Switzerland, Benteli Ag, 1985), 16.

are used to jolt their collective memories.<sup>28</sup> Boltanski wants viewers to recognize and ultimately complete his work. By doing so, the viewer attaches his or her own specific meaning to Boltanski's universal characters.<sup>29</sup>

I am familiar with only one piece by Erika Suderburg, an installation entitled To Be Administered Before Sleep: New Stone City for the Dead, that was reviewed in the Summer 1992 edition of Visions Art Quarterly. According to author Judith Spiegel, it represents the latest installment in Suderburg's continuing investigation of memory, loss, and the attending fragmentation of personal history.<sup>30</sup> As described by Ms. Spiegel, the gallery floor was first filled with white salt. Inlaid on raised beds of rock salt were 36 square slate tablets that formed a grid. Each tablet had a photograph and a line of ambiguous text (characterized by Spiegel as shards of "personal and public history").<sup>31</sup> Illumination was provided by small lamps placed at the base of each tablet.

While Suderburg's themes were obviously relevant, I was primarily intrigued by her method of presentation and choice of materials. For example, Spiegel notes the corrosiveness of the salt used and suggests that Suderburg's structural schemata was intended to evoke impressions of cemeteries and museums - places that are both public and intensely private, and where individual activity is usually limited to interior dialogues.<sup>32</sup>

## SELF-EXAMINATION AND SELF-PORTRAITURE

The videos and the pieces that are clearly self-referential, such as Odds Are and 5 Reasons Why People are Drawn to the Helping Professions, necessarily raise the issue of self-portraiture. Daily Occurrences and other pieces which merely incorporate my likeness arguably fall into the same category. Self-portraiture has interested photographers since the inception of the medium.<sup>33</sup> Further, few other subjects in photography have been explored so thoroughly, especially over the past twenty-five

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<sup>28</sup> Hoy, 88.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Judith Spiegel, review of To Be Administered Before Sleep: New Stone City for the Dead, by Erika Suderburg, Visions Art Quarterly 6, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 43.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>33</sup> Richard B. Woodward, "Documenting an Outbreak of Self-Presentation," New York Times, 22 January 1989, sec. H, 31.

years.<sup>34</sup> A list of disparate artists who have looked at themselves seriously would include the likes of Lee Friedlander, Judy Dater, William Wegman, Robert Maplethorpe, Cindy Sherman, Duane Michals, Bruce Charlesworth and Christian Boltanski.<sup>35</sup> It should not be surprising that interest in self-portraiture often coincides with stages in life that naturally call for review and self-examination.<sup>36</sup>

Self-portraits can satisfy our curiosity about how we appear, serve our narcissistic tendencies and document our need to perform in a world where performance is the manner by which we negotiate reality.<sup>37</sup> They provide an opportunity for self-analysis.<sup>38</sup> They also enable the image maker to record a mentally experienced state or, like an actor, assume a role for the purposes of either revelation or concealment.<sup>39</sup> Roger Marcel Mayou suggests that playing the part of oneself intensifies the truth of personal experience.<sup>40</sup> Who is better than you to embody and recreate the important visual memories you have accumulated?

Successful self-portraiture, according to Margo Jefferson, requires the correct balance of self-love, self-loathing, self-respect and self-mockery.<sup>41</sup> Although the artist zeros in on him or herself as subject matter, the audience must not be shut out. The personal must somehow be transformed into the universal.<sup>42</sup> Christian Boltanski has stated that whenever he produces something that is autobiographical, he thinks as much about the audience that will eventually view it as he does about himself.<sup>43</sup>

5 Reasons Why People are Drawn to the Helping Professions was inspired by a magazine article by Thomas Maeder entitled "Wounded Healers". In the article, Mr. Maeder attempts to explain why certain personality types are attracted to the idea of helping "those in need", particularly through the medical profession and psychiatry. Having experienced a form of that attraction myself (my undergraduate degree

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34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Erika Billeter, "The Exhibition," Introduction for Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography: Photographers Reflecting Their Own Images, ed. Erika Billeter, (Switzerland, Benteli AG, 1985), 8.

37 Woodward, "Documenting an Outbreak of self-Presentation," sec. H, 31.

38 Billeter, 7.

39 Ibid.

40 Roger Marcel Mayou, 16.

41 Margo Jefferson, "Self-Portraits on Stage: Perspective Is Crucial," New York Times, 30 July 1995, sec. H, 5.

42 Barbara Lee Smith, "Illness and Art: Bodies of Work," FIBERARTS, Summer 1995, 37.

43 Christian Boltanski, "What is Erased," a conversation with John Baldessari for Blind Spot, Issue 3 (Fall/Winter 1994): [47].

included Certification in Mental Retardation along with a B.S. in Art Education, and my decision to attend law school was precipitated, in part, by the erroneous belief that I could best protect the “weak and the innocent” through the law), I read the article with the hopes of gaining some insight into the reasons behind a number of my important life decisions. Had I been lured towards service occupations by unspoken promises of adulation? Did I crave authority and the dependence of others? Was I merely trying to create an image of goodness? Or, did I hope that by helping others I would somehow be helping myself?<sup>44</sup> It wasn’t much of a leap to wonder about whether Maeder’s “reasons” were applicable to certain public individuals who are noted primarily for their benevolent conduct. 5 Reasons Why People are Drawn to the Helping Professions does not purport to provide answers about the underlying motives of Mother Theresa, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King or Billy Graham. Rather, it is merely intended to make the viewer wonder whether Mother Theresa is just as screwed up as the rest of us.

The use of my high school picture in 5 Reasons Why People are Drawn to the Helping Professions was dictated by both the nature of the piece and, again, the desire to link it with the other works that had been produced up to that point. Using myself as model for other pieces, such as Daily Occurrences and Every 20 Minutes, was more a matter of practical necessity. I have always had difficulty directing models and as a rule prefer working by myself. However, I also discovered that after one turns thirty years old, finding friends who are willing to look silly in front of a camera becomes more problematical.

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Maeder, “Wounded Healers,” The Atlantic Monthly, January 1989, 37.

## FIRST INQUIRY: STATISTICS

The great always introduce us to facts; small men introduce us always to themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling...<sup>46</sup>

Ursula K. Le Guin

The Left Hand of Darkness

The function of statistics is to make complicated information simple and understandable. <sup>47</sup> Data is collected, analyzed, categorized and distributed.

It didn't take too much reading about numerical variables, continuous variables, discrete variables, measures of central tendency, measures of dispersion, frequency distribution, bivariate analysis, correlation, probability and sampling to convince me that understanding statistical methodology was most likely unnecessary, not to mention impossible. In addition, how was I to evaluate the sundry other considerations that effect the results of a study or survey, such as the size of the study population, the phrasing of the questions, the order of the questions and so forth?

Cynthia Crossen, author of Tainted Truth, observes that numbers produced by polls, studies and surveys are powerful and credible persuaders. <sup>48</sup> She adds, however, that statistical manipulation has a long and rich history in the United States. <sup>49</sup> Further, more and more of the information we rely on today has been collected primarily for the purpose of selling a product or advancing a cause. Behind a facade of neutrality lies an agenda.<sup>50</sup> In today's information business, the truth

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45 Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emerson: Selections From Self-Reliance, Friendship, Compensation and Other Great Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, selected by Stanley Hendricks, (Kansas City, Missouri, Hallmark Cards, Inc., 1969), 55.

46 Ursula K. Le Guin, The Left Hand of Darkness, (New York, Ace Books, 1969; Ace Books, 1976), 1.

47 Hyman Alterman, Introducing Statistics, (London, Faber and Faber, 1968), 5.

48 Cynthia Crossen, Tainted Truth: The Manipulation of Fact in America, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1994), 12.

49 Ibid., 15.

50 Ibid., 14.



belongs to whoever commissions the study. <sup>51</sup>

As I continued to cull information from a variety of sources including The 1991 Information Almanac, The Day America Told the Truth, What the Odds Are, On an Average Day, The Gay Book of Lists, 100% American, The Book of Lists and The Universal Almanac, the accuracy of such information eventually became an irrelevant consideration. What only seemed to matter was what the numbers suggested and whether or not they piqued my curiosity.

## SECOND INQUIRY: MENTAL HEALTH/MENTAL ILLNESS

Magazine and newspaper articles, almanacs and books dealing specifically with the subject of mental illness all contributed to the following pieces: Changes in Male Self-Esteem Between the Ages of 14 and 18, Symptoms, Jump/Thump or, the 4th Most Popular Way That People Take Their Own Lives and Every 20 Minutes. Statistical information pertaining to suicide seemed particularly plentiful. For example, I learned that New York had the lowest suicide rate in the country. It was tied with New Jersey. The state with the highest rate? Nevada. <sup>52</sup> I also discovered that shooting oneself with a gun was the most common method for committing suicide, followed by ingesting drugs, cutting wrists, jumping, inhaling poisonous gas, hanging and drowning. <sup>53</sup> The number one method was broken down even further by shot location (1.temple, 2. mouth, 3.forehead). <sup>54</sup>

I originally intended to do just one piece that would incorporate all seven ways of killing yourself. This concept was later abandoned in favor of seven separate pieces. Of the seven contemplated only one, depicting the 4th method (jumping), was fully realized.

The instructional installation Symptoms, which deals with the warning signs of depression, was produced during a period of personal depression.

*One day, in the afternoon, I was flicking channels on the TV and came across a rerun of Highway to Heaven, which starred Michael Landon of Bonanza fame as an angel named Jonathan Smith. I never watched the show during it's original run. In*

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>52</sup> John W. Wright, ed., The Universal Almanac 1990, (Kansas City, Andrews and McFeel, 1989), 226.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Davis, "Whether Koresh Shot Himself Remains Mystery," USA Today, 4 May 1993, sec. A, 3.

fact, I'm sure I hated the show without ever having seen an episode. On that day, however, for some reason I stopped flicking and began to watch. I had missed the beginning of the story, but it appeared as though a little boy and his father had been in a car accident. (Every five minutes or so you would see them, lying unconscious in the wrecked automobile.) In between, a dog (presumably the boy's) runs all over the place and barks at people in an attempt to get someone to follow him back to the accident scene. Finally, Michael Landon and Victor French (his character, whose name I can't remember, was a retired cop who traveled around the country with Michael Landon's angel) follow the dog, find the car and save the boy and his father. As the boy is being loaded into an ambulance, he asks where his dog is. Everyone looks around. The dog is nowhere to be seen. Moments later, the camera shows the dog lying in the back seat of the car, dead. He was in the car at the time of the accident. The dog has been dead the whole time and it was really a dog ghost or angel that did all the running around to save the boy.

The episode ends with this scene of the dog sitting and looking at the camera. He's smiling and may have even raised his paw like Lassie used to do when they were rolling the credits at the end of her show. Behind the dog are big, puffy clouds that slowly move so that the sun can break through every once in a while. The dog is clearly in heaven.

Tears welled up in my eyes. For the next two or three weeks, I sat in front of my TV every afternoon at 4:00, waiting for Highway to Heaven. Watching it made me feel so good. Every day, Jonathan and Victor French's character would help various people overcome some type of personal crisis. By the end of the show they were always happy. Their faith in God and each other was always restored. Jonathan and Victor French's character would then drive off in their car with smiles on their faces. I sorely wanted to have a Jonathan in my life. The Victor French character was optional.

A variety of factors contributed to my depression. And, in retrospect, I suspect that having to put my own dog to sleep a few months before seeing Highway to Heaven added to the overwhelming effect of the program. However, the experience caused me to contemplate the many

different and individual ways that depression manifests itself. For me, it included an intense desire to watch reruns of Highway to Heaven.

### THIRD INQUIRY: MEMORY

Memories are our most enduring characteristic....Memory defines who we are and shapes the way we act more closely than any other single aspect of our personhood....Lose your memory and you, as you, cease to exist. 55

Steven Rose  
The Making of Memory:  
From Molecules to Mind

Probing one's own history not only evokes memories. It also raises questions about the nature of memory. How does it work? How accurate is it? Why do we remember some things and forget so many others? For instance, I will never forget that the privilege which prevents the government from forcing one spouse to testify against another spouse in a criminal proceeding does not apply when the spouse being tried is charged with importing aliens for the purposes of prostitution. As an attorney, I worked exclusively on civil cases. I had no experience with criminal matters, let alone ones that involved the question of spousal privilege. I read this bit of information only once. It was a footnote in some treatise on evidence that I reviewed while preparing for the bar exam. Yet for some reason, this trivial nugget of knowledge has been retained while large quantities of other information that I used on a regular basis now seems lost forever.

It is generally agreed that memory revises itself over and over in the course of a lifetime. 56 John Kotre, author of White Gloves, states, "We go through adulthood like artists, continually painting over the portrait of ourselves that we first made in adolescence." 57 Periods of intense reworking seem to correspond with significant changes in adult life and are therefore, fairly predictable.

What happens physiologically and biochemically when a memory is made or when it is recalled is not particularly important for the purposes of this discussion. However, a number of observations by Kotre and Steven

55 Steven Rose, The Making of Memory: From Molecules to Mind, (New York, Anchor Books Doubleday, 1992), 1.

56 John Kotre, White Gloves: How We Create Ourselves Through Memory, (New York, The Free Press, 1995), 7.

57 Ibid., 161.

Rose, author of The Making of Memory, do seem pertinent. 58

On the question of why some memories are so vivid, Kotre offers four possible reasons. First, the remembered event was novel. It broke from the "normal script", causing a neurological flash bulb to go off. 59 Second, the experience proved to be consequential, the first in a falling chain of dominoes. 60 The third possible reason is that the experience either engendered a great deal of emotion or was somehow connected to an

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58 Humans come into the world with a rudimentary form of recognition memory. (Kotre, 124.) Most adults, however, are unable to retrieve memories of events that occurred prior to the third year of life. (135-136.) Memory itself is a developmental process. (Rose, 103-104.) As we grow and the brain changes, how we remember changes significantly. Most young children see and remember eidetically. (103-104.) As a result, our earliest memories are often concrete, similar to a "a series of snapshots, fixed or frozen in time." (103.) Adult memories, on the other hand, are more linear (105-106.) and assume a narrative structure. (Kotre, 158.) According to Rose, this change in the quality of memory helps to explain the very different ways we remember our childhood experiences from our adult ones. (103-104.)

Memories can often be recovered by using retrieval cues. (Kotre, 40.) What constitutes such a cue can vary considerably. Physical locations, auditory stimulation, visual stimulation and emotional states can all serve as retrieval cues that open the floodgates of memory. Unfortunately, according to Kotre, for all that systematic research has told us about memory, science cannot explain the spontaneous recollections we experience when we are not trying to remember anything in particular. (56.)

Two kinds of information go into memory. First is the original perception of the event. Second is the information supplied afterwards. (35.) With respect to the former, a mechanism called perceptual filtering comes into play. Perceptual filtering ensures that the brain registers only a small portion of the information arriving at one's eyes and ears at any given time. (Rose, 104) Many of the criteria by which we filter inputs are learned and vary from person to person. (105) As a result, "one person's relevant information is another's irrelevance." (105.) Over time, our original perceptions and the information we add later blend together to form a new, single memory that replaces what was originally present. (Kotre, 35.)

Added to all of the above is a phenomenon called cryptomnesia which is described most simply as remembering what you were told but forgetting that you were told. (36-37) Because of cryptomnesia, an individual can be convinced that a particular memory reflects actual personal experience when in fact it was created by hearing certain words or by viewing a photograph or film. To make matters even more confusing, cryptically implanted memories look and feel just like the real ones. (36-37.)

We all have a personal history. When sifting through memories to fashion such a history, it is not uncommon to create positive illusions about oneself. Interestingly, these illusions may be essential to maintaining positive mental health. (117.) The most common illusion, or perhaps more accurately, distortion, is the expansion of one's role in past events. We see ourselves as more central to what was happening than we really were. We emphasize our own contributions while diminishing the contributions of others. (113.)

Finally, memories can also be "transformed" over time. Facts may remain relatively the same while our interpretations or the emotional associations we make change. (67-68.)

59 Kotre, 93.

60 Ibid., 94-95.

event of historical significance.<sup>61</sup> Fourth, the experience has become a symbol, a single concrete event that stands for either a major theme or a point in time in our lives. <sup>62</sup>

Applying the above to my “alien prostitute” memory, I suspect that Kotre’s first reason would be most applicable. The experience was novel in that the mental image I formed while reading the passage was one of space aliens rather than people who were not United States Citizens. As a result, it struck me as a funny rule, which may also take us into reason number three.

There are countless factors that impact on the quantity and quality of memory, even if one excludes memory decay caused by physical deterioration or injury. And while many people believe that certain characteristics, such as a wealth of detail or the presence of emotion, are indicators of accuracy and truthfulness, scientific research has not borne this out. <sup>63</sup>

Every personal experience recounted in my video stories was “true and correct to the best of my knowledge, belief and recollection.” However, my reading on the subject of memory has led me to the conclusion that all of my best efforts and serious intentions may have been somewhat irrelevant. Chances are, I was wrong about a lot of things. For example, in the video story “I Wanted to be a Priest,” I say that the priest who married the nun was an alcoholic. However, both my mother and my sister insist that it was the other Assistant Pastor who was the alcoholic. A minor point, I know. Yet it is unsettling to contemplate the proposition that firmly held memories, many of which define our personality, may be as much fiction as fact.

Finally, although all of the above is relevant to the stories recounted in my two videos and to Odds Are, only Untitled (with text stating “My mother” and “Photograph found in a department store picture frame that reminded me of my mother”) is about memory per se. It is indicative of how photographs serve as retrieval cues for memory and is intended as a statement about both the power of memory and how experience causes us to see “public” things in our own personal way.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 97-99.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 38.

## FOURTH INQUIRY: MARIAN VISITATIONS

Fourth inquiry? Well, not really. Maybe a tangent. Visits by the Virgin Mary Between 1928 and 1975 was the product of both my new-found interest in statistical information and the ongoing personal history review.

As indicated in my video, I am the product of 12 years of Catholic education. During that time period, I attended religion class for 1 hour every school day. That came to approximately 180 hours of religious training every year, and more than 2,160 hours overall. Needless to say, I am pretty familiar with Mary. Not only is she the mother of Jesus and the first saint, she is what you would call a "Mega Saint." More people pray to her with requests to intercede with God than to any other saint.

Over the years, I heard many of the stories about her occasional visits, like the time she was sighted in Lourdes in 1858 or when she made multiple appearances in Fatima in 1917. However, in the course of my investigative meanderings, I was amused to discover that someone had compiled a list of the top eight countries frequented by Mary between the years 1928 and 1975.

Originally, I envisioned an eight part piece with each piece representing one of the eight lucky countries. A box would be constructed containing a map of the country in question and an appropriate number of little, plastic Virgin Marys. To determine how often Mary came to visit, one would simply have to tilt the box and count the plastic Marys.

Unfortunately, only two boxes were completed. One was for Italy, the country where Mary spent most of her time with 83 visits. The United States, ranked 6th with only 9 visits, occupied the second box.

The above-mentioned list precipitated an intense search for more information on Marian apparitions. Although much of what I read was fascinating (examples would include Freud's hypothesis that religious hallucinations serve as a mechanism for discharging sexual energy <sup>64</sup> and the story about a woman who saw the face of Jesus in a forkful of spaghetti <sup>65</sup> ), it did not translate into any additional pieces.

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<sup>64</sup> Michael P. Carroll, The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986), 140-141.

<sup>65</sup> Jill Smolowe, "A Heavenly Host in Georgia," Time, 18 January 1993, 35.

## VISUAL STRATEGIES: GENERAL

The fruits of my investigation into statistics and the nature of memory seemed to indicate that much of the information I intended to present may very well have been false. In developing my visual strategies, however, I ultimately selected formats which would naturally convey a sense of veracity. By making such selections, was it my intention to actually undermine my method of presentation? Or, was I clinging to the belief that my memories were not illusory? Although these motivations may seem somewhat opposed, I honestly suspect that both played a significant role.

## VISUAL STRATEGIES: PHOTOGRAPHY

Historically, photographs have been used to corroborate our visual experience of the world and to collect data.<sup>66</sup> “The visible forms of flora, fauna and far off lands, monuments, engineering feats and criminals’ faces could all be cataloged and were.”<sup>67</sup> The use of photographs, therefore, contributed to the appearance of scientific purposefulness.<sup>68</sup> Also, because the photographic image was believed to reproduce with measurable accuracy the physical reality of the subject, it became inextricably linked to the idea of empirical truth.<sup>69</sup>

In the 1960s, artists began to recognize the virtues of a deadpan medium like photography. The activity of collecting data was turned into an art enterprise.<sup>70</sup> As part of a revolt against Abstract Expressionism, artists played the role of “neutral observer, accumulating humdrum data by wielding a camera like an adding machine.”<sup>71</sup>

In discussing Every Building on the Sunset Strip, Ed Rusha claimed that his photographs were simply a collection of facts.<sup>72</sup> Dan Cameron

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66 Charles Desmarais, Proof: Los Angeles Art and the Photograph 1960-1980, (Hong Kong, Pearl River Printing Co., 1992), 13.

67 Vicki Goldberg, “Seven Thousand Pictures are Better Than One,” New York Times, 23 August 1992, sec. H, 25.

68 Charles Stainback, Special Collections: The Photographic Order From Pop Until Now, (New York, International Center of Photography, 1992), 7.

69 Beryl J. Wright, “Back Talk: Recoding the Body,” text for Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer, (Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), 15.

70 Goldberg, “Seven Thousand Pictures are Better Than One,” sec. H, 25.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

characterized them as “verifiability taken to an absurd extreme.” <sup>73</sup>

Much of John Baldessari’s work concerns art as information. Pictures taken primarily for the purpose of recording information and with no artful intent (examples would include photographs taken by realtors and insurance adjusters) are used as elements of larger compositions.<sup>74</sup>

Many photographers and artists continue to exploit photography’s status as evidence and ongoing reputation for veracity even though it is well known that a photograph can be easily manipulated. <sup>75</sup> While Christian Boltanski’s continued use of photographs is predicated, in part, on their ability to jolt our collective memories, he also believes that they continue to be readily accepted as proof of reality. <sup>76</sup>

With respect to the subject of memory, Kim Zorn Caputo claims that memory and the drive not to forget are the primary forces behind the making of art. <sup>77</sup> Today, photographic images are our dominant partners in our dialogue with the past. <sup>78</sup> They have become the “common coin of memory.” <sup>79</sup> As memory changes the past, so does photography change memory. <sup>80</sup> Vik Munz suggests an additional consideration:

Through the photographic image we remember the past with a richness of detail - a property that conditions both the subject and the photographer in the process of the photographic act itself. A recording ‘for prosperity’. The urge to improve the image of the present (when it will be the past, in the future) takes over, making the photograph a collection of intentional memories, staged moods and edited settings. A perfect past is fabricated through the the exclusive collection of ‘good moments.’ <sup>81</sup>

The photograph can also serve as a physical metaphor for memory. They fade and deteriorate. They can be altered and manipulated. And, as discussed below, when photographs are used in groups, editing and sequencing can effect meaning.

<sup>73</sup> Dan Cameron, “Love in Ruins,” text for Edward Ruscha, ed. Elbrig de Groot, (Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1990), 12.

<sup>74</sup> John Baldessari, “What is Erased,” a conversation with Christian Boltanski for Blind Spot, Issue 3 (Fall/Winter 1994): [46].

<sup>75</sup> Hoy, 6.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>77</sup> Kim Zorn Caputo, “Amnesia,” Blind Spot, Issue 3 (Fall/Winter 1994): [2].

<sup>78</sup> Ellen Handy, “Time, Memory, & the Limits of Photography, or Expanding Upon Passing Moments, Memory Traces, & Light Images,” Photography Quarterly, #63, Vol. 16. no. 2 (1995): 4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>81</sup> Vik Muniz, “Unforgettable,” Blind Spot, Issue 3 (Fall/Winter 1994): [10, 12].



## VISUAL STRATEGIES: GRID AND SEQUENCE

Although I have never been concerned with conceptual art's interest in redefining the conditions and forms of the art object, I have been attracted to many of the methods of visual presentation used by conceptual artists.

The key to good memory is an orderly arrangement of the objects to be remembered.<sup>82</sup> The grid is an organizational and informational structure that, in theory, is infinitely extendible.<sup>83</sup> It connotes a cool reverence for order<sup>84</sup> and is an ideal format for constructing art works that catalog, classify and/or combine multiple photographic elements into a unified piece.<sup>85</sup> It invites the viewer to analyze, scrutinize and compare.<sup>86</sup> The grid, therefore, seemed like an appropriate choice for some of my informational pieces.

Related to the grid is the concept of sequence. As previously indicated, the use of multiple images is nothing new. In the days of Pop Art, there was a tremendous interest in seriality because of the relationship between mass production and mass media.<sup>87</sup> During the 1970s, many photographers discovered that single images were inadequate for their purposes. One such photographer, Duane Michals, likened the single photographic image to a wrapped-up package and described his decision to use sequential imagery as an attempt to show what was inside.<sup>88</sup>

Like Michals, I often find that the single image is insufficient, especially when dealing with events that are "complex configurations of experience, intention and interpretation."<sup>89</sup> And, as a practical matter, sequencing photographs provides an additional means to guide the viewer towards the interpretation of choice.<sup>90</sup>

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82 Rose, 63.

83 Goldberg, "Seven Thousand Pictures are Better Than One, sec. H, 25.

84 Ibid.

85 Stainback, 7.

86 Ibid., 10.

87 Timothy Druckrey, "From Data to Digital: Montage in the Twentieth Century," text for Metamorphoses: Photography in the Electronic Age, (New York, Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1994), 6.

88 Julia Scully and Andy Grunberg, "Currents: American Photography Today," Modern Photography, March 1979, 98.

89 Druckrey, 7.

90 "SSSSSEEEQUUEENNCCEEE," Camera, February 1971, No.2, 21.

## VISUAL STRATEGIES: DIRECTORIAL MODE AND NARRATIVE

As stated earlier, I work primarily in the directorial mode. In a 1976 article entitled, "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition," author A.D. Coleman offered the following description:

Here the 'authenticity' of the original event is not an issue, nor the photographer's fidelity to it, and the viewer would be expected to raise those questions only ironically. Such images use photography's overt veracity against the viewer, exploiting that initial assumption of credibility by evoking it for events and relationships generated by the photographer's deliberate structuring of what takes place in front of the lens as well as the resulting image. There is an inherent ambiguity at work in such images, for even though what they purport to describe as 'slices of life' would not have occurred except for the photographer's instigation, nonetheless those events (or a reasonable facsimile thereof) did actually take place, as the photographs demonstrate.

Such falsified 'documents' may at first glance evoke the same act of faith . . . but they don't require the permanent sustaining of it; all they ask for is the suspension of disbelief. <sup>91</sup>

Staged photographs are almost as old as the medium itself. Early practitioners included such notables as Henry Peach Robinson, O.G. Rejlander and Julia Margaret Cameron. <sup>92</sup> In fine art photography circles, it was considered out of vogue from about 1910 through the late 1950s. <sup>93</sup> And although many viewers continue to feel that photographs which are essentially vehicles for the photographer's ideas lack the power of images that spring directly from life, <sup>94</sup> the 1960s ushered in a return to fabrication and the use of narrative. <sup>95</sup>

For photographers who work in the directorial mode, hereafter referred to as directorial photographers, the theater is their model and

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<sup>91</sup> Coleman, 251.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 253-254.

<sup>93</sup> Hoy, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Susan Weiley, "The Darling of the Decade," ARTnews, April 1989, 146.

<sup>95</sup> Hoy, 8.

and the studio is their stage.<sup>96</sup> Ann Hoy classifies directorial photographers as Late Modernists who reject the Modernist's fidelity to the medium but continue to support the concept of artist as creator.<sup>97</sup> The Late Modernist looks both inward, plumbing the imagination, and outward, toward the other arts.<sup>98</sup> Baldesarri, Michals, Les Krims, Arthur Tress and Joel-Peter Witkin are but a few of the artists Hoy would place in this category. Much of their work contrasts significantly to that of Post Modern artists who view individual invention as irrelevant and prefer to survey the existing imagery of public life in order to critique the stereotypes that mass culture and the media have forced upon us.<sup>99</sup>

The serious Modernist would occasionally evoke symbolic meanings, but was prohibited from regressing so far as to tell a story.<sup>100</sup> Narrative was the route taken in middle-brow arts such as movies, popular fiction, songs and comics.<sup>101</sup> Storytelling, however, has been the *raison d'être* for art throughout most of its history.<sup>102</sup> And we, as people, will continue to collapse our experiences into narrative structure or stories in order to make them intelligible.<sup>103</sup> John Baldessari states, "The parable is the best teaching strategem; the minute you start telling a story the interest level of your audience picks up."<sup>104</sup> Stories are non coercive and provide a safer way to confront the conflicts and traumas of everyday life.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Max Kozloff, "Through the Narrative Portal," ARTFORUM, April 1986, 86.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Hoy, 8.

<sup>103</sup> Geoffrey Cowley and Karen Springen, "Rewriting Life Stories," Newsweek, 17 April 1995, 70.

<sup>104</sup> John Baldessari, "A Talk With Baldessari," interview by James Hugunin, in Photography and Language, ed. Lew Thomas, (San Francisco, Camerawork Press, 1976), 80.

<sup>105</sup> Coosje van Bruggen, John Baldessari, (New York, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1990), 69.

## VISUAL STRATEGIES: TEXT

Adding language to a photograph can anchor, contradict, reinforce, subvert, complement, particularize, or go beyond the meaning offered by the image itself.<sup>106</sup> They can be a help or a hindrance. Although still considered unacceptable in some photography circles, the tendency to incorporate text with photographs has become increasingly widespread since the 1970s.

Artists such as Baldesarri are fascinated with how words and images interact.<sup>107</sup> He is ambivalent about which to prioritize and appreciates how the combination can contribute to the understanding of information and the effective presentation of same.<sup>108</sup>

Barbara Kruger utilizes confrontational text for its quickened effect.<sup>109</sup> By combining such text with a compelling image, Kruger can forcefully point the viewer to a meaning that she has selected in advance.<sup>110</sup> Jenny Holzer, on the other hand, uses words alone because it permits direct contact with an audience.<sup>111</sup> Both artists prefer short messages, believing that they are more potent than long ones.

## VISUAL STRATEGIES: FINAL PRESENTATION

Jenny Holzer states:

For the art to be successful, and ... for the content to be compelling, the subject must be presented in a way that is appropriate. Appropriate means that formal considerations have been attended to, that they are as marvelous as the message.<sup>112</sup>

Because some viewers have a tendency to avoid issues that are

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106 Terry Barrett, quoting Allan Sekula, 134.

107 Baldessari, "A Talk With Baldessari," 80.

108 John Baldessari, "John Baldessari: Recalling Ideas," interview by Jeanne Siegel, in Art Talk: The Early 80s, ed. Jeanne Siegel, (New York, Da Capo Press, Inc., 1988), 39.

109 Barbara Kruger, "Barbara Kruger: Picture and Words," interview by Jeanne Siegel, in Art Talk: The Early 80s, ed. Jeanne Siegel, (New York, Da Capo Press, Inc., 1988), 302.

110 Jeanne Siegel, ed., quoting Roland Barthes in an interview with Barbara Kruger, "Barbara Kruger: Picture and Words," 304.

111 Jeanne Siegel, ed., introduction to interview with Jenny Holzer, "Jenny Holzer's Language Games," 285.

112 Jenny Holzer, "Jenny Holzer's Language Games," 294.

potentially painful or troublesome, I decided early on that I would make all of the pieces as physically attractive as possible. I envisioned bright colors or “candy for the eye.” I additionally intended that the physical presence of each piece (color, size, shape, construction, etc.) would serve as one of the unifying elements of the show. I was concerned, however, about creating a “sameness” that would work against my overall intentions.

Color choices were made very deliberately and Johannes Itten’s The Art of Color was referred to on a regular basis. (On more than one occasion I walked into the local hardware store with Itten’s book in my hand, pointed to pictures of the colors that I wanted and asked that the paints be mixed accordingly.)

The three untitled pieces with hand photographs and text that played on the word “hand” required harmonious colors that would cause the hands to advance towards the viewer. As originally conceived, the pieces were to hang together. Fear over being redundant later caused me to separate them. I eventually came to view each piece as a the visual equivalent of a comma, creating occasional breaks in the flow of the show. Audience reaction to this conceit were mixed. Some viewers felt the pieces worked as intended. Others indicated that they would have preferred seeing them hang together. Still others suggested that all three could have been eliminated entirely.

Bright yellow was selected for the border of Changes in Male Self-Esteem Between the Ages of 14 and 18 because of Itten’s suggestion that it conveyed the message of knowledge and truth.<sup>113</sup>

Appropriation of images from my high school yearbooks was motivated solely by convenience. It was never my intention to become involved in the Post Modern dialogue on originality and the ever growing glut of images. Pictures of my classmates were rephotographed, printed, hand colored and then photographed again over backgrounds that were intended to suggest positive or negative emotional states through the use of design, color and, most importantly, text that read either “Happy With Self” or “Unhappy With Self”. Under each face was a name, originally printed with thick, black press-on letters. The type was later removed, however, and, in an effort to make the piece appear more “personal”, replaced with hand written signatures.

Over the course of my thesis exhibition I was repeatedly asked whether the information was accurate with respect to my pictured former classmates. I explained that although I had my own personal suspicions,

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<sup>113</sup> Johannes Itten, The Art of Color, (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1961), 132.

the assignment of “Happy” or “Unhappy” was a purely arbitrary process with one exception: myself. Because my self-esteem did not take a nose dive until college, I purposely elected to depict myself as “Happy” at both 14 and 18.

As previously indicated, Jump/Thump or, the 4th Most Popular Way That People Take Their Own Lives was inspired by statistical information pertaining to suicide. Blue was chosen as the background color because of its associations with coolness, spirituality and immortality.<sup>114</sup> The building and falling man were appropriated from an Andy Warhol silkscreen (Suicide, 1962). The clouds, on the other hand, were lifted from Rene Magritte’s The Memoirs of a Saint. The use of progressively smaller images and frames represented an attempt, perhaps heavy-handed, to add to the sense of falling.

The origins of Every 20 Minutes were similar to that of Jump/Thump or, the 4th Most Popular Way That People Take Their Own Lives. Every 20 Minutes, however, went through more changes than any other piece in my show. It was first conceived as a real time performance piece. Over a twenty minute period, images would be placed in white, individual frames (they were attached with only velcro) at one minute intervals. A bright red border, intended to suggest passion and anger, surrounded the white background frame.

After deciding to forego the performance aspects, I found the piece to be particularly difficult to resolve visually. As a result, I continuously tinkered with the images and color scheme. Initially, the images consisted only of the clock face, some of which had numbers or letters. When read together, the letters and numbers would say, “Every 20 a suicide”. The final or 20th image underwent numerous permutations. The original, unadorned clock face was first replaced with an image of me holding a gun to my head. This later became a double exposure of me, the gun and the clock face. A subsequent version even pictured a clock face that had been shot with a rifle. The image that I finally settled on for the exhibition was part of a three picture sequence where I raise my finger to my head and blow the top half of my head off. Although the use of a finger was both an attempt to play with audience expectations and add an element of visual variety, I continue to worry that this solution was too broad and heavy handed. Had I been able to come up with it, a subtle conclusion may have been more effective.

With respect to color, after a series of unsuccessful experiments, I

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 135-136

settled on violet, the color of the unconscious and death.<sup>115</sup> Immediately prior to the exhibition, however, a touch of green was added (two of the individual frames) to compliment the violet and as a suggestion of hope.<sup>116</sup>

## VISUAL STRATEGIES: VIDEO

Although recent events seem to have established video as the new signifier of authenticity,<sup>117</sup> my move to video from primarily two-dimensional work represented both an effort to explore alternative methods of presenting information/stories and to find an even more personal "voice." However, I cannot deny that there was also a desire to entertain. And, of course, there was William Wegman's suggestion that, "Big is good but hard to store. Small, nobody gets to see. Video exploded the whole issue of size and scale."<sup>118</sup>

The majority of stories contained in the two videos originated as single or multiple photographic images combined with text. Initial attempts to expand the stories using slide projectors, film strips and audio tape were creative dead ends.

Knowing that I did not yet have the skills nor the equipment to produce a "slick" (some might say professional) product, I decided at the beginning that I would keep things simple. 1/2 inch VHS tape was used rather than HI 8 or the 3/4 inch format. I also concluded (rationalized?) that such an approach was in keeping with the personal nature of the project. Wasn't VHS the format used by most parents when recording the family summer vacation or a child's school play?

A handful of new stories were written solely for video. Existing ones were rewritten, though not to any great extent. There was no conscious decision to concentrate on death or religion as subject matter. The stories seemed to just fall into one category or the other. Being the product of 12 years of Catholic education, it should not be surprising that many memorable and self-defining life experiences would somehow involve Catholicism. As for death, although recent circumstances may have added to the fear and fascination, I must confess that it has always been a matter of great interest. Life itself has been defined as a constant

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Druckrey, 6.

<sup>118</sup> William Wegman, "Videotapes: Seven Reels," Wegman, Martin Kunz, ed., (New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), 25.

confrontation with death.<sup>119</sup> For Duane Michals, the contemplation of death heightens his sense of being alive.<sup>120</sup> In a culture that is surrounded by death, it is perhaps the ultimate subject.<sup>121</sup> Christian Boltanski opines that all photographs say something about the idea of absence and the fact of dying.<sup>122</sup> Hollis Frampton goes even further by suggesting that all art is made primarily as a defense against the humiliating, insistent, pathos of our one utter certainty: that we are going to die.<sup>123</sup>

Story boards for each story were roughed out, followed by a search for the film clips, video clips and still photographs that would be used as illustrations. Original images were also necessary. All photographs, original and appropriated, were rephotographed on slide film, projected on a screen and recorded on video tape. The shots of me addressing the camera and the minimal camera effects (pans, zooms, jump cuts, etc.) were recorded multiple times to ensure a usable shot. I also filmed variations of a number of other shots so that I would have more to pick from when I finally began the editing process.

Not having the benefit of a camera person, I was often forced to set up the lights and camera, press the "record" button and then stand (or sit) at a predetermined spot to deliver my lines. Some viewers found the resulting "talking heads" quite static. I felt, however, that this form of visual presentation was consistent with my sense of humor.

Another potential technical problem involved image "drop off." When original tape is copied for a master tape and the master tape is later copied to make presentation tapes, a loss of color and image quality is inevitable.

At the completion of filming, I had over twenty video tapes containing approximately forty hours of information. Working in 1/2 inch VHS precluded the use of time coding. Editing, therefore, became very cumbersome and time consuming. Logs had to be prepared for all of the tapes. This involved watching each tape in it's entirety and noting on a piece of paper both a description of the scene and the corresponding machine counter number. Finding a desired scene usually required rewinding the tape to the beginning, resetting the counter to zero and then

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119 Barbara Kruger, "Barbara Kruger: Picture and Words," 307.

120 Livingston, [3].

121 Duane Michals, "Theater of the Forbidden: Duane Michals and Joel-Peter Witkin," transcript of panel discussion between Duane Michals, Joel-Peter Witkin and A.D. Coleman, PHOTO/DESIGN, (January/February 1989): 74.

122 Christian Boltanski, "What is Erased," [46].

123 Hollis Frampton, "Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity," ARTFORUM, October 1974, 39-40.



fast forwarding to the appropriate location.

Multiple “rough cuts” of each story were produced for the purposes of comparison. Each rough cut was then viewed numerous times in order to evaluate timing, shot selection, scene transition and the need, if any, for sound effects. Timing was arguably the most important consideration and by the time of my exhibition, I was fairly satisfied with the pace of each story. Subsequent viewings, however, have convinced me that some additional fine tuning may still be necessary.

One final note. The decision to add statistical information to the video stories was made fairly late in the process and with the intention of tying the videos closer to the two-dimensional pieces. I believe the information accomplished this purpose. However, I am also convinced that the statistics enhanced the individual stories and made it easier for both videos to stand on their own.

## CONCLUSION

I have always had a problem with closure. Near the end of the thesis process, the following question was posed to me: “What do you know now that you didn’t know before?” I suspect that the most significant revelation was the confirmation of a number of intuitively held suspicions regarding personal identity, memory and statistics. I continue to wonder about the persuasive power of numbers. Perhaps they simply help satisfy some basic need for order and a sense of certainty.

As previously indicated, throughout this project I made every effort to be “accurate” or somehow substantiate what I said, despite the knowledge that my information was, in all likelihood, unreliable. Often, however, I found myself contemplating the possibilities of pure fabrication. I mean, why couldn’t I have just made the stuff up?

My personal review goes on. I continue to gather statistical information on a variety of topics that strike my interest and, most importantly, I write my stories.

## Appendix

## Appendix 1

PIECES FOR ALMOST TRUE STORIESOdds Are

1991

Mixed media

55" x 24"

Untitled

1991

Mixed media

22" x 26" (Each)

Text reads "My mother" and "Photograph found in a department store picture frame that reminded me of my mother"

Untitled (3 separate pieces, each combining photographs and text variations on the word "hand")

1991

Mixed media

33" x 19"

Symptoms

1992

Mixed media installation

Desk: 22" wide x 30" long x 30" high

Screen: 40" x 40" (Screen + Stand: 60" high)

Changes in Male Self-Esteem Between the Ages of 14 and 18 (I) and (II)

1992

Mixed media

45" x 30"

Daily Occurrences

1992

Mixed media

51" x 44"

Jump/Thump or, the 4th Most Popular Way That People Take Their Own Lives

1992

Mixed media

27" x 75"

5 Reasons Why People Are Drawn to Helping Professions

1991

Mixed media

63" x 78"

Every 20 Minutes

1992

Mixed media

39" x 49"

Visits by the Virgin Mary Between 1925 and 1975 (I) and (II)

1992

Mixed media

21" x 17" x 4"

## Appendix 2

VIDEOS FOR ALMOST TRUE STORIESVery Short Stories (Many Concerning Religion) and Other Information

Product of 12 Years of Catholic Education  
Utrillo  
Product of 12 Years of Catholic Education, Part 2  
I Wanted to be a Priest  
Lives of the Saints  
Pagan Babies  
Saint Christopher  
The Necessary Things for a Full and Happy Life  
The Price is Right  
First Dance

Very Short Stories (Most Concerning Death) and Other Information

How One Artist Has Portrayed Death or, I Have Been  
Influenced by Duane Michals.  
The First Time I Dealt With Death.  
Zorro.  
Bob Crane.  
Bob Crane, Part 2.  
Tiny Bubbles.  
I Have Been Influenced by Duane Michals and Walt Disney.

***A GUIDE TO  
PSYCHIATRIC DIAGNOSIS  
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***FOR THE  
HELPING PROFESSIONS***

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## Appendix 3

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## *Chapter One: The Nature and Effects of Conflict*

The causes of mental disturbance have always been a mysterious, controversial, and misunderstood subject. I speak of causes since, of course, no single factor can explain all the various illnesses. Some mental disorders are clearly produced by organic causes, by physical damage of one kind or another—for example, to the central nervous system from an infection such as syphilis, or from the pressure and damage caused by a brain tumor. The etiology of such disorders is relatively easy to understand. (Although there are still mysteries. Why does one person with severe hardening of the arteries of the brain exhibit mental symptoms such as confusion, disorientation, and memory loss, while another individual with about the same degree of damage to the arteries and brain remains sharp and clear in thinking?) But numerous other mental difficulties seem to be produced at least partially by purely psychological influences, with no organic change or damage evident in the central nervous system. Such disorders are referred to as *psychogenic* and are much more difficult to understand and to investigate. All sorts of conceptions have arisen about how psychological influences



## Appendix 3

can affect a person; some are based on fact, some on fancy, most are based on a mixture of the two. Many schools of thought have developed, including those following the teachings of Freud, Jung, Adler, Rank, Horney, Fromm, and Sullivan as well as those deriving from the ideas and investigations of Pavlov. The fact that these various psychiatric schools have differing conceptions about psychogenic causation can be quite confusing to the interested student. However, one element in psychogenesis is accepted by virtually every school and by almost every competent psychiatrist: the element of *conflict*. Consequently, I am going to devote some attention to the nature of conflict and the kinds of effects it can produce in all of us.

Conflict is defined by the dictionary as “a fighting or struggling for mastery.” In order to understand this definition better, let us consider some experimental work that has been done with animals in the research laboratory. Many experiments could be discussed, but the particular one that I have chosen to review was conducted over thirty years ago by H. S. Liddell and his colleagues and involved sheep as the experimental animals (Liddell, 1939, 1963; Maslow & Mittelmann, 1951, pp. 23-25). In a typical experimental series, a sheep was brought into the laboratory and trained to stand on a platform in a restraining harness. A period of struggle occurs until the animal learns to be cooperative and to stand quietly in the harness. After the animal learns this much, a metronome is set to beating at the rate of one beat per second. On every fifth beat—every five seconds—a mild but distinctly painful electric shock is delivered to one foreleg of the sheep, causing the animal to flex the leg. After this process is repeated a certain number of times, a simple type of learning or conditioning occurs in the sheep. It learns to stand quietly both when the metronome is silent and when it is beating. Moreover, as each fifth beat of the metronome approaches, the animal learns to flex its foreleg just as the shock is delivered. By flexing its leg just in time, the sheep avoids getting the electric shock and thus avoids pain.

## Appendix 3

After accomplishing this much, the researchers then began to lengthen the interval at which the electric shock was delivered, giving it at ten, fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five seconds, but always at the same interval. In each instance it was possible to condition the sheep so that it learned the interval and would stand quietly and flex its foreleg at the appropriate times. When a thirty-second interval was reached, however, some very interesting results ensued. Apparently, waiting this length of time is too difficult a task for the innate capabilities of the sheep's central nervous system. Consequently, the animal cannot learn this behavior and begins to show evidences of profound disturbance. It will wait too long to flex its foreleg, or will flex it prematurely, before the shock is being delivered. After a number of such experiences, the animal's general behavior begins to break down. It becomes consistently restless on the platform, moving the foreleg even when the metronome is not beating, or flexing the foreleg with every beat. Finally, the sheep becomes resistant to coming to the laboratory and has to be placed on the experimental table by force, where previously it had come willingly in a collar and chain. Even more striking is the fact that the animal's behavior begins to change outside the laboratory after this breakdown. It becomes more restless in its pen, both during the day and night, it tends to be withdrawn from other animals or people, to crouch in a corner, and to be more submissive when attacked by another sheep. Moreover, the animal's pulse becomes rapid and irregular compared with that of a normal sheep.

What the researchers have produced, then, is a neurotic animal—one that has undergone a breakdown. Significantly, this breakdown involves at least three areas. First of all, the animal's performance is disturbed, and it can no longer effectively cope with the electric shocks and avoid the painful stimulus. Secondly, its social behavior is disturbed as evidenced by withdrawal and submissiveness to attack. And thirdly, the physiology of the sheep is affected as shown by the changes in the pulse. We shall see that in human beings,

## Appendix 3

also, breakdown can involve changes and difficulties in these same three areas of performance, social behavior, and physiology.

Going back to the definition of conflict, we can see that the experimental situation set up for the animals in the laboratory was one of conflict—the fighting or struggling for mastery. And the conflict in this instance basically was unresolvable. Given the inborn limitations of the sheep's central nervous system, there was no possible way that it finally could achieve mastery of the situation. It could not cope with the electric shocks at the time interval given and yet it was physically restrained in the harness from running away and removing itself from its difficulties. And this basic situation of unresolvable conflict—the inability to master or adjust to a situation—produced breakdown. Liddell's work is by no means unique; W. Horsely Gantt has experimented with dogs and Jules Masserman with cats to produce breakdown.

What concerns us most here is making comparisons, and drawing inferences from these other animals to the human species. Admittedly, such comparisons are precarious and we must be cautious in making them, for no other animal is equivalent to the human being in the development of the central nervous system and the functions which this system can carry out. And yet, just as there is a limit to the capacity of the sheep's nervous system—or the cat's or the dog's—so there must be a limit even to the tremendous capacities and potentials of the human nervous apparatus. Consequently, most psychiatrists feel that emotional or "nervous" breakdown in the human comes from conflicts—conflicts that the person cannot cope with or master and that are unresolvable by him. In the human being, moreover, such conflicts are seldom simple. They tend to be both complex in nature and multiple in extent. And, since in infancy and childhood the capacity for mastering situations is least developed, these are the times when conflicts can be most damaging. As a matter of fact, the human nervous system is not even physically fully

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developed at the time of birth. Some of the nerves in a newborn infant are not yet myelinated—protected with a fatty sheath or covering—and do not become myelinated until the first year of extrauterine life. So the human being enters life as a helpless, partially undeveloped animal. In this state, the infant is completely and precariously dependent—dependent on other humans to give it the food, warmth, physical protection, and intimacy that are essential for the infant's survival. (I include intimacy in this list of vital necessities because the investigations of Spitz and others (Bowlby, 1952) have clearly indicated the infant's absolute need for being touched, held and fondled by a mother figure.)

Moreover, the human being remains in a state of absolute dependency, followed by relative dependency, far longer than any other animal. For years—extending through infancy and childhood—the human animal cannot really survive by himself but must rely on other beings for his existence. This dependent condition leaves the child vulnerable to many situations of overwhelming conflict. A typical example is the following: an eight-year-old boy, whom I will call Jerry, was brought to a psychiatric clinic because of disturbed behavior in school and at home. In school he was withdrawn and uncooperative; restless and unable to sit still in class, he seemed to relate very little to the other children and to disregard the teacher's instructions. At home, his parents reported that although obedient, he showed the same restlessness, was very hostile to his only sibling—a brother two years younger—and was unable to get along with any of the other children in the neighborhood. The family and developmental history obtained from the parents was striking. Both mother and father were perfectionists with rigid ideas about child rearing and behavior. The mother stated, with evident pride, that Jerry had been a wonderful baby and had given her no trouble at all. She claimed that she had completely toilet trained him, both for bladder and bowels, by the time he was eleven months old. Questioning revealed

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that Jerry had shown a frequent tendency to constipation thereafter, but his mother handled that by administering enemas to him whenever he failed to have a regular bowel movement. Jerry's history contained much more of this sort of information, but I think what I have related is quite indicative of the kind of extreme conflict situation to which he was subjected. Jerry's parents undoubtedly loved him in their own fashion, yet they forced him to cope with situations that were too demanding for his capacities; I have cited the toilet training as typical of these demands, but it was only one example.

I find that I think of little Jerry quite often when I am lecturing about Liddell's sheep, for he showed so many of the same symptoms of breakdown exhibited by laboratory animals: he was withdrawn, extremely restless, functioned poorly in school, and even began to regularly soil his pants with feces, much to his mother's discomfiture. He was a human animal in whom breakdown had been produced, most unwittingly and in the name of love, by his early upbringing.

In this day and age most parents have enough knowledge and sophistication about psychology and child rearing to avoid using the rigid approach to toilet training that Jerry's mother employed. However, in spite of Dr. Spock and all the manuals, the care and upbringing of children remains a difficult task for even the most loving of parents. I doubt that any guidelines can guarantee success in this task. After all, parents are faced with the twin necessities of meeting the needs of their completely dependent children and at the same time civilizing them: that is to say, training them to control their impulses and conform to patterns of behavior that make for social acceptance. It is not surprising that few, if any, of us can carry out both these tasks smoothly and without some areas of excessive conflict. Moreover, I have been talking so far about parents who are basically loving and accepting of their children. Consider how much more difficult the situation is, and how the possibilities for conflict multiply, when

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one or both parents are hostile, rejecting, or ambivalent toward a child.

I have discussed conflict because it is basic to all the mental disorders we will be examining. Neuroses, psychoses, personality disorders—each of these forms of disturbance represents a solution or adjustment, albeit a deviant one, that the human being subjected to unresolvable conflicts must resort to for his survival.

Before concluding this chapter, I wish to mention two more points about experimental breakdown in animals. These are points that my classes have always raised as questions and that have striking implications about possible parallels in human behavior.

First, sheep or other animals subjected to breakdown in the laboratory will continue to exhibit disturbed behavior long after the laboratory procedures are completely stopped, often right up until their deaths. Cure of the disturbance ensues if the sheep is put out to pasture and left undisturbed for about a year and a half. Certainly, this recalls the “rest cures” that still are widely used by psychiatry in cases of human breakdown.

Secondly, if a female sheep who has been conditioned into breakdown then has offspring, these will exhibit the same pattern of disturbance—restlessness, withdrawal, and so on—right from their birth. This suggests that the disturbance in the mother animal is profound enough to affect the offspring in the uterus and to be transmitted to them.

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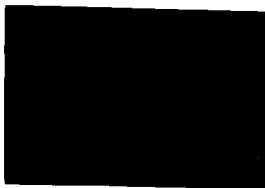
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Paul Porell  
**Almost True Stories**



Paul Porell  
**Almost True Stories**



Paul Porell  
**Almost True Stories**



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**Almost True Stories**



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**Almost True Stories**



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**Almost True Stories**



Paul Porell  
**Almost True Stories**



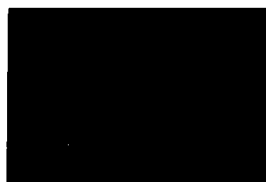
Paul Porell  
**Almost True Stories**



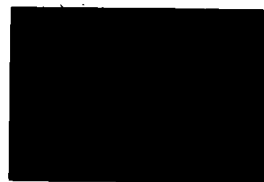
Paul Porell  
**Almost True Stories**



Paul Porell  
**Almost True Stories**



Paul Porell  
Untitled



1991  
Mixed media  
33" x 19"

Paul Porell  
Untitled



1991  
Mixed media  
33" x 19"

Paul Porell  
Untitled



1991

Paul Porell  
***Visits by the Virgin  
Mary Between***



1925 and 1975 (II)

Paul Porell  
***Visits by the Virgin  
Mary Between***



1925 and 1975 (I)

Paul Porell  
**Jump/Thump or, the 4th  
Most Popular Way That**



**People Take Their Own  
Lives** 1992

Mixed media 27" x 75" →

Paul Porell  
**Jump/Thump or, the 4th  
Most Popular Way That**



**People Take Their  
Own Lives** (Detail) 1992

↑

Paul Porell  
**5 Reasons Why People  
Are Drawn to Helping**



**Professions**  
1991

Mixed media 27" x 75" →

Paul Porell  
**5 Reasons Why People  
Are Drawn to Helping**



**Professions** (Detail)  
11" x 14" (Each)

↑

**Are Drawn to Helping  
Professions** (Detail)



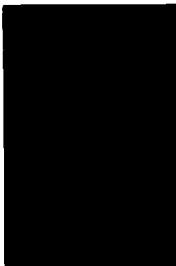
Paul Porell  
**5 Reasons Why Pe**

**Are Drawn to Helping  
Professions** (Detail)



Paul Porell  
**5 Reasons Why People**

Paul Porell  
**5 Reasons Why People  
Are Drawn to Helping**



**Professions** (Detail)

↑

**Are Drawn to Helping  
Professions** (Detail)



Paul Porell  
**5 Reasons Why People**

**Are Drawn to Helping  
Professions** (Detail)



**Professions** (Detail)

↑

Paul Porell  
**Every 20 Minutes**



1992  
Mixed media  
39" x 49"

↑

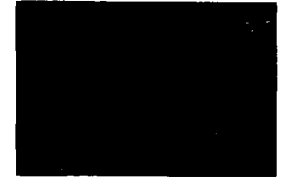
Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**  
(Detail)



1992  
Mixed media

↑

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**  
(Detail)



1992  
Mixed media

↑

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**



(Detail)

↑

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**



(Detail)

↑

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**



(Detail)

↑

Paul Porell  
Untitled



1991  
Mixed media  
20" x 26" (Each)

Paul Porell  
**Changes in Male Self-  
Esteem Between the Ages**



of 14 and 18 (I) 1992  
Mixed media  
25" x 30"

Paul Porell  
**Changes in Male Self-  
Esteem Between the Ages**



of 14 and 18 (II) 1992  
Mixed media

Paul Porell  
**Symptoms** (Detail)



Slide projection

Paul Porell  
**Odds Are**



1991  
Mixed media  
55" x 24"

Paul Porell  
**Symptoms** (Detail)



Slide projection

(Many Concerning Religion  
and Other Information)

Paul Porell  
**Symptoms** (Detail)



1992  
Slide projection

Paul Porell  
**Symptoms** (Detail)



1992  
Slide projection

Paul Porell  
**Symptoms**  
1992  
Mixed media installation



Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**



1992  
Mixed media

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**  
(Detail)



1992  
Mixed media  
10" x 8" (Each)

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**  
(Detail)



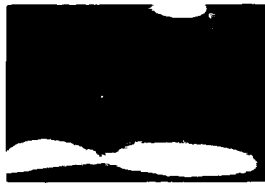
1992  
Mixed media  
10" x 8"

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**



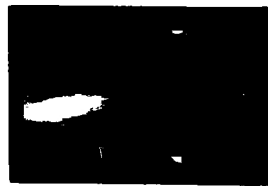
(Detail)

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**



(Detail)

Paul Porell  
**Daily Occurrences**



(Detail)

Paul Porell  
**Every 20 Minutes**  
(Detail)



1992  
Mixed media  
6" x 6" (Each)



Paul Porell  
**Every 20 Minutes**



oil  
6" x 6"



Paul Porell  
**Every 20 Minutes**



(Detail)  
6" x 6"



Paul Porell  
**Every 20 Minutes**



(Detail)  
6" x 6"



Paul Porell  
**Pagan Babies**  
video still 1992



**Very Short Stories**  
(Many Concerning Religion)  
and Other Information

Paul Porell  
**First Dance**  
video still 1992



**Very Short Stories**  
(Many Concerning Religion)  
and Other Information

Paul Porell  
**Zorro**  
video still 1992



from **Very Short Stories**  
(Most Concerning Death)

Paul Porell  
**I Have Been Influenced**  
by Duane Michals



and Walt Disney  
video still